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Onward and Upward

EARLY, and ominous, signs point to the probability of sharply higher municipal taxation in some B.C. communities this year when 1959 budgets have been completed. Mayor Scurrah has given warning that a substantial rise of several mills is possible in Victoria, while other municipalities in the Greater Victoria area may also be affected. While details of provincial assessment yet to be learned may affect the result, it is becoming clear that many municipalities will go into the new period with sharply rising costs. On schools' account there will be a definite mark-up whoever is to pay for it. It is not different with purely internal municipal costs, where salary adjustments are concerned. Not a few municipalities meanwhile have drawn down their cash surpluses from the previous period.

For a number of reasons increased tax rates in municipal areas would come as bad news this year, and it is not an expanding one. Higher rates would affect the percentage of effective collection; render more difficult the payment of taxes due; and bear hard against property owners already faced with a sharp upward revision of assessments. It is not so much the rate of tax that discourages individuals as its never-ending march onward and upward. Yet, with more people than ever to provide services for and no significant new fields of taxation, municipal councils may have little or no real option in the matter. They cannot cut services already pared thin.

After a few more municipal budgets on an ascending scale, there may be a number of B.C. communities ready to study the proposals of Reeve Murison, of North Cowichan, with more attention than they have done yet. Reeve Murison has contended strongly that the basic division of provincial-municipal obligation and participation is uneven and in some degree outmoded by the weight of the respective services that must be furnished today. The crux of his argument, endorsed by the Union of B.C. Municipalities, has been that municipalities should pay for their own express services, and the province absorb the mounting costs of education and other obligations which have no direct relation to a tax on land.

Proof Is in the Pudding

A PROFESSOR in Alberta says that the "mechanics" of education are none of the public's business. Presumably he thinks the public should just meekly underwrite the expenditures and keep quiet. This is not an argument likely to be accepted outside academic circles.

Admittedly education is one of those subjects on which everyone considers himself an expert, while the truth of course is that teachers know more about teaching details than do outsiders. Educationists are trained for their profession and perforce should be better qualified in the performance of their art than the man in the street.

This point cannot go the whole way, however; for instance to the utter exclusion of public awareness of what education is all about. Parents cannot watch their children grow up and follow their progress through school without learning a great deal about methods and curriculum, and developing some degree of judgment on the matter. The public in general cannot fail to glean some knowledge of the "mechanics," if only through the result presented to them by the educational quality of school graduates.

The public hasn't much say in the business in any case; certainly it seems helpless to stem the rising cost of education. It should not be expected to wash its hands of the whole matter however just to please professors. If it foots the bill, as it does, then it has some right to show interest and voice concern about the end product of its investment. That inevitably means some questioning about the nature of the education being provided and whether it is getting its money's worth in return. The proof of the pudding, with education as with anything else, is in the eating. Some people find nowadays that the pudding could be more edible.

Nature's Unchanging Pace

STELLAR observatories of the world acknowledged Spring yesterday, the sun having passed the equator. The frogs celebrated it before that; as early as 10 days ago, when by coincidence the moon was in conjunction with the planet Venus. Their swelling two-toned chorus boomed out from many ponds in an orchestration as old as man. Over their heads, the oaks quietly were putting out terminal leaf buds; unhurried and calm, nowise dismayed by the fast rush of the ornamental boulevard trees into pink, white and red blossoms, which yet may be nipped by frost.

At sundown, moving backward now by minutes daily, the seagulls were timing to a second their return to the roosting rocks. About 15 minutes before the street lights come on they leave the harbor, the drydock and choice haunts of the day on a straight course eastward to their haven. The shadows of the poplars now grow longer in the lingering twilight. The planets shine out soon, followed by first magnitude stars; Sirius in the southeast; the Big Dipper, with its handle pointing straight down, in the northeast. Nature keeps a perpetual calendar.

Only man expects a new season without preparation and without cause. He would have his dreams blossom in the winter, without any budding. Day or night mean no more to him now than the flick of a light switch. The hours are fast or slow as his mind runs. Too long ago perhaps he lost his roosting rock, some point from which he could swing through the heavens as part and parcel of it all.

Island Editors Say

Will Be Debt-Free

At this writing we do not know exactly how a comparison of property taxes between Ladysmith and the adjoining districts will work out, but we do know that few if any municipalities in this province have as much to offer in terms of financial stability as Ladysmith has.

To begin with, Ladysmith will be completely debt free by the time amalgamation proceedings could be completed. Secondly, Ladysmith has cash reserves of more than $40,000 which it uses to finance through the early months of the year until current taxes begin coming in. Thirdly, Ladysmith now has most of its own services installed and paid for, this includes good paved roads, sidewalks, parks, public buildings, water and sewer services. It has works equipment which is adequate or nearly adequate to serve the larger area and this is also fully paid for.

—LADYSMITH CHRONICLE

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Driver's Nightmare

The establishment of designated crosswalks appears to have lulled some pedestrians into a false sense of security. They can be struck just as dead in a crosswalk as they can anywhere else.

The law states that a pedestrian shall not step off the curb into oncoming traffic if a vehicle is close enough to render it impractical for the driver to yield the right-of-way. It should also be noted that a vehicle has the right-of-way until the pedestrian is approaching or occupying the vehicle's half of the highway.

We all have our rights as pedestrians —let us not abuse them.

—COURTENAY ARGUS

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Student Drivers

A prominent educationist has informed The Review that in the majority of cases those students provided with automobiles are among the less successful academically. Whether a direct line can be drawn from this statistical information is not entirely clear.

The same educationist suggested that if the minimum age at which a driver could obtain a licence were raised to 18, the problems of schools would be relieved and students would be enabled to fulfil their academic obligations without distraction. Such a proposal would undoubtedly meet with the approval of the insurance companies whose greatest problem is the youthful driver. It would meet with the approval of many teachers, while parents who are concerned today at the manner in which their children ignore other considerations in favor of mobility would be relieved of a serious problem.

Late Crocuses at Oak Bay Golf Links —Photo by CECIL CLARK

Thinking Aloud

". . . of shoes—and ships—and sealing wax—of cabbages and kings."

By TOM TAYLOR

IN 1910 I was unaware that men on skates propelled a rubber disc called a puck over an ice surface with a stick. Probably I was watching little girls pushing into chalk - marked squares a similarly shaped piece of stone called a peever.

But apparently in Ontario that year a chap, peculiarly enough also named Taylor although with the sobriquet "Cyclone" attached, which makes a deal of difference, skated backwards six yards and poked the puck into the net.

The point of this bygone incident is that the feat grew with the years, just as stories do with the telling. The six-yard back-skate became the length of an arena, not in the mind of Mr. Cyclone himself but in the recollections of spectators. Only last week a letter in the Ottawa Journal revived the legend.

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Not every story reaches the distinction of a legend but many of them go a long way. They grow in the imagination. After a few tellings indeed they may scarcely be recognizable to someone who first heard them. This can be very commendable, however, stemming as it might do from a desire to be more interesting. Certainly if a brick falls off the roof and passes your head a yard away you stimulate your friend if, on second or third thinking, you remember it missed you only by an inch. His eyes pop and as the teller of the tale you are rewarded. When he relates your mishap to someone else the inch is liable to be quartered, exaggeration by reduction, as it were.

A pernickety person will pull you up sometimes if he hears your story too often, and this is always a deflating experience. Husbands and wives are expert at bringing their spouses down to earth in this regard, rather surprisingly too, for they should be able to admire a mutual capacity for stretching things. Of course repetition does rather dull even the best story. The thing is never to tell it twice to the same person, but this requires a good memory and imagination is crimped if one has to stop and wonder if the listener has heard it before.

The instinct to exaggerate must be born in us. No circle seems to be exempt. Fishermen are supposed to be great storytellers, although often enough the tale is short and it's only the fish that has lengthened. Old soldiers are not far behind the fishermen, however, and my wonder grows each time I happen to hear them swop reminiscences. And, if I could eavesdrop at a pink tea, I daresay some suspicious-sounding yarns would reach my ears.

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The pernickety person I mentioned would affirm, no doubt, that all we do when we exaggerate is tell fibs. That will be so, but with the saving grace that they are unintentional fibs. It's just a matter of letting the mind delight in spreading itself. Actually this is all that professional storytellers do on paper. If a fib is a lie then of course novelists and short-story writers are the biggest liars the world has ever known, for they deal in fiction which is the opposite to fact. But happily we differentiate between fibs, or little white lies, and the real falsehoods.

If we didn't we would have rather a sticky time trying to untangle the truth of things, a hard enough job as it is. The storyteller has always had absolution and some licence towards exaggeration. If he weren't fanciful he wouldn't be a storyteller. When I am caught stretching a story, therefore, I like to excuse myself by pointing to the great and revered masters of fiction.

So far, however, I haven't enlarged a backward six yards into the whole length of an ice arena; but only perhaps because I didn't think of it.

Letter from London

Prospects Bright for Tax Relief

By RICHARD L. THOMAS

THIS is the season of happy forecasting. The British budget is due to be brought down on April 7 and it is a customary exercise at this time of year to tell the chancellor of the exchequer what to do. The main difference between this year and most other years is that the chancellor himself seems to be bubbling over with the excitement and hardly able to contain himself at the prospect of good news.

And of course it is also election year.

The two factors taken together and the chancellor's own statement that the British economy has never been more buoyant since the war presupposes a happy state of affairs.

The only trouble is that it makes March a very bad month for trade. Already sales of motor vehicles have dropped off. The time-payment companies have announced some increase in deposits. Most of the big stores report "an expected reduction in sales."

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The trouble is purchase tax (sales tax to you). It seems probable that there will be substantial reductions and as the purchase tax on the cheapest model automobile is equivalent to nearly $700 it is not unreasonable for potential purchasers to hold off and for the hire-purchase companies to want increased deposits to counteract any reduction in second-hand values which would follow. And the same factor discourages trade in all items subject to purchase tax.

One furniture store in an attempt to keep its staff busy has announced that anyone purchasing furniture before the budget will be given full credit for any reduction in purchase tax—which suggests that the furniture business is fairly profitable!

A forecast indicative of the changing times is the suggestion that stamp duties should be abolished on contracts for the sale of stocks and shares in small parcels to encourage the small investor.

There has been a tremendous increase in the past year in the number of small investors and the growth of mutual funds in which investors hold units in a trust. The cost of duty and transfers is claimed to have retarded progress and it is possible that the government will agree to concessions or even abolition of duties on small purchases provided that stockbrokers also reduce their fees. The ideal situation for the small investor is the ability to purchase stocks and shares with a simplicity equal to purchasing a magazine or packet of cigarets.

Entertainment tax is also under review. Cinemas alone among major entertainment enterprises pay tax, and since the last budget another 400 cinemas in Britain have been closed and many of them sold for redevelopment. It is suggested that any loss in revenue as the result of abolition could be recouped by means of an additional tax on football pools. At present winners do not pay directly, but the aggregate of the pool is taxed. The chancellor, in the face of several individual wins equivalent to $600,000, may well consider a direct tax on winnings in excess of a certain amount. This could have the effect of reducing some of the fantastic prizes now offered.

It would be certainly one of the least painful taxes. A winner of $600,000 would hardly complain if he was able to collect only $400,000 and the benefit to the exchequer over a year would be considerable. It has been suggested that a 25 per cent tax on all winnings over £10,000 would be well worth while for the exchequer with no risk of killing the goose which lays the golden eggs.

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A reduction in the standard rate of income tax is almost a certainty, together with big concessions for smaller income earners. It has been demonstrated with some force that the amount of tax collected from persons earning less than £500 a year is hardly worth the cost of collecting. The actual cost to the government is, of course, very much less than appears on the surface because most of it is obtained by deductions made by employers. Many large concerns have to employ a considerable staff at their own expense for the purpose of making these deductions, and these could be reduced very considerably if lower incomes were exempt. Against that has to be weighed the possibility of considerable clerical unemployment.

The chancellor may also attempt to iron out some of the anomalies in income tax. For example the value of one child to a £500-a-year couple is £25, compared to a married couple with no children; but in the £100,000-a-year class (they do exist) the value of one child in actual income is £1,000. Whatever the ultimate figures, taxpayers should at least get some worthwhile concessions.

Time Capsule . . . — *By G. E. Mortimore*

Riverboat Days

THE Special Powers Act, giving Liberal Premier T. D. Pattullo and his cabinet virtually dictatorial authority to rule by order-in-council between sessions of the B.C. Legislature, was passed 25 years ago.

It aroused hot protests from Conservatives, members of the CCF and citizens' groups.

Premier Pattullo said the act was intended to help the government fight the economic depression.

F. P. Burden, recently retired B.C. agent-general in London, arrived back in Victoria . . . At least 1,000 were killed in a fire that laid waste the city of Hakodate, Japan.

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VICTORIA was winter headquarters for Skeena River sternwheelers, 50 years ago.

"With the coming of spring, energetic preparations are going on for the coming season's work on the Skeena River. Captain Jackman is busily engaged getting the stores ready for shipment north for the Hudson Bay river steamer Port Simpson and will go north with his crew about the end of this month.

"The steamer Distributor of the Grank Trunk Pacific, which has been hauled out in the upper harbor since being laid off last winter, will be launched and made ready for service about two weeks hence, and will leave for the Skeena river about April 10. Meanwhile, progress is being made on three new sternwheelers being built."

"King Edward witnessed two flights by Wilbur Wright this afternoon, and showed . . .enthusiasm." So said a despatch from Pau, France, 50 years ago.

"The sky was unclouded, and there was very little breeze. Wilbur and Orville Wright and their sister, Miss Wright, were presented to His Majesty. Wilbur then conducted the king to the aeroplane shed, where the king minutely examined the mechanism of the machine.

"Mr. (Wilbur) Wright remained in the air for seven minutes, performing marvelous evolutions with the utmost precision around the king and his party, and coming to the ground without difficulty."

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IT was time for a census of Vancouver Island's population, the British Colonist remarked 100 years ago.

". . . It is absolutely necessary to a proper consideration of the means we have at our disposal from which we can derive a revenue to support the government of the colony . . .

"In a very few months, the (Hudson Bay) Company's charter ceases. Then the responsibility of supporting the government will rest on our shoulders.

"If Customs are not imposed, taxes must be. There is, then, an evident necessity for us to know what we, as a people, are worth . . .

"Everything taxable should be enumerated; the quantity of land sold, the number of acres under cultivation, the houses, mills, stock, merchandise, money, town lots, wharves, machinery, vessels, steamers, etc. The value of the whole should be set down.

"With this set down, we could tell at a glance the extent of our ability to support a government, and whether we would be unable to do so without the assistance of the Home Government."

—FROM COLONIST FILES.

The Packsack

Of GREGORY CLARK

SITTING in the office of a fishing crony of mine who is a dealer in farm machinery, earth-moving tractors and other grisly mechanical monsters both new and second-hand, I overheard an interesting conversation.

A man, either a big-time farmer or a small-time contractor, came in and sat down facing the dealer. He had a pencilled list in his hand.

"Bill," he said, "what's your price on the following?" He read off the list, a matter of seven items of machinery.

Bill took the list and studied it. He made some notes with his pencil, added up the figures, made a few amendments, scratched his head, added them up again, while all the time the prospective customer sat watching him intently.

Finally, Bill announced a figure, something over $3,000, and passed the memo back to the visitor.

"Is that the best you can do?" asked the customer.

"Yep," said Bill. "There's a profit in that for you and me both." The customer studied the figures, then got up and waved a greeting and departed.

"That," I said, "is the cutest remark I ever heard. A profit for you and me both."

"He'll be back," said Bill. Let's go to lunch."

When we got back, the customer was waiting, ready to close the deal.

Fun, Fact and Fiction

Watching the old war movies causes anxiety about our chances of winning another world war, when Errol Flynn and Van Johnson would be so much older.

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Dr. Wernher von Braun urges mothers to encourage their sons' interest in space. Such, maybe, as the space behind the ears, where the dirt is?

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Prosperity and increased living costs are predicted for 1959. Just another of those great years most of us can't afford.

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In the U.S. the olive industry is campaigning vigorously to have olives included in the school lunch program. It must be clearly understood, however, that the gin and vermouth interests are not associated with this move.